From: Siegel Zachary - OHS on behalf of Siegel Zachary - OHS <ZacharyS@ckschools.org>
To: President @ CKEA
Subject: Fw: Concern Regarding the Overtly Christian Nature of the Announced Spirit Days
Date: Monday, December 16, 2019 10:49:21 AM

Hi Kirstin,

I am forwarding you an email exchange I am having with Gail Danner, my building principal.

On Thursday, I expressed concerns that some of this week's spirit days were exclusionary and violated CKSD's equity policy.

I received a response this morning that I found... dissatisfying.

I have responded, citing specific pieces of CKSD policy 0030 concerning equity.

I am at a bit of a loss as to what to do, depending on Ms. Danner's next response, if I even receive one.

Based on written policy, I was expecting that "response to concerns related to inequities may involve an assessment of district policies, programs, and practices," not a unilateral decision.

This is also a troubling shift from last year, when Rebecca Johnson wrote, "As we move into the holiday season, this is my gentle reminder that we have many students, families, and staff who celebrate the holidays in different ways. Public school is a place where we need to be sensitive and respectful of individual histories, world views, and religions – for these reasons, please do not put up any religious or holiday symbols and/or displays in classrooms or other places in our building. As you think about how many students here at OHS who qualify for free and reduced lunch, the reminders of holiday "cheer" expressed through lights and symbols can be a sad reminder of how little they may have this year.

We want to ensure that Olympic High School is a place that is accepting and inclusive to all – please do your best to respect everyone who spends their days with us."

That email was sent to all OHS staff, the directory of secondary instruction, the director of human resources, and the presidents of both labor unions.

It's disappointing to say the least, especially because CKSD abandoned any sense of transparency when it assigned Ms. Danner to OHS from CKHS.

It's clear based on her initial response that she just doesn't get it.

So, what should I do next? I spoke with a building rep, and they suggested emailing you since

just including Jeremy Monroe as a BCC might be perceived as passive aggressive, and I don't really feel like getting into hot water with the new boss.

Thanks,
Zack Siegel
Olympic HS

From: Siegel Zachary - OHS <ZacharyS@ckschools.org>
Sent: Monday, December 16, 2019 10:39 AM
To: Danner Gail - OHS <GailD@ckschools.org>
Cc: Wilson Scott - OHS <ScottW@ckschools.org>; Manada Val - OHS <ValM@ckschools.org>; Haun Alexys - OHS <AlexysH@ckschools.org>; Andrews Nate -OHS <NATEA@ckschools.org>
Subject: Re: Concern Regarding the Overtly Christian Nature of the Announced Spirit Days

I am struggling to reconcile this response against portions of CKSD policy 0030:

"The district shall ensure that each site creates a welcoming and inclusive culture." (E)

"The district shall provide programs...which are geared towards the understanding and appreciation of culture, class, language, ethnicity and other differences that contribute to the uniqueness of each student and staff member." (H)

What I am hearing is that "the ASB team attempted to give everyone an opportunity to participate whatever their beliefs," therefore it doesn't matter that students/staff who identify as religious minorities feel excluded by some of the spirit days. The policy does not say "attempts to create," so I disagree that this provision was fulfilled.

Wednesday's spirit day is not presented as simply "holiday characters"; it is presented as "Elves vs. Reindeer or Holiday Character." The explanation that it was intended to be all-inclusive holiday characters is nullified by the unnecessarily exclusionary prefixed information.

The concern with Friday's spirit day is not that red, green, gold, and white are by themselves associated with Christmas. It is the deliberate combination of those four colors that are associated with Christmas (and the pagan solstice holiday Yule from which those colors were appropriated). Even if that were not the case, those four colors do not make any attempt to include all holidays and traditions.

We've always used OHS school colors for our winter spirit days--Why was this even changed? What rationale was given?

Consequently, myself and others who identify with religious minority groups are made to feel alien and unwelcome in our community.

I also think the notion that we would want to advertise our differences because ASB "attempted to give everyone an opportunity to participate whatever their beliefs" is a perspective rooted in majority culture privilege. It is profoundly uncomfortable, especially for teenagers, to set oneself apart from mainstream cultural values, especially in terms of religion.

That is the very reason why an equity policy such as CKSD's is so vital.

Our place of work or school should not constantly remind us of the fact that we, on a very fundamental level, can never truly belong. This is exacerbated when government entities engage in the practice of elevating some religious traditions over others.

From: Danner Gail - OHS <GailD@ckschools.org>
Sent: Monday, December 16, 2019 6:57 AM
To: Siegel Zachary - OHS <ZacharyS@ckschools.org>
Cc: Wilson Scott - OHS <ScottW@ckschools.org>; Manada Val - OHS <ValM@ckschools.org>; Haun Alexys - OHS <AlexysH@ckschools.org>; Andrews Nate -OHS <NATEA@ckschools.org>
Subject: RE: Concern Regarding the Overtly Christian Nature of the Announced Spirit Days

HI Zach,
I have been pondering this quite a bit over the last few days and I appreciate your thoughtful approach to the question of winter festivities. The question of balance and appropriateness this time of year is a challenge for all. I know we have a diverse student body, and I know the ASB students did use, in their discussion, the filter of inclusion rather than exclusion. I see it through their lens of options each day, and while I agree that it still deserves some consideration, I can also see where the student leaders are coming from.

My belief is that the ASB team attempted to give everyone an opportunity to participate whatever their beliefs.

For example, on Monday, winter PJ is what I would consider universal, and additionally on Tuesday, flannel is universal, on Wednesday, a little more iffy, but holiday character could be from any holiday or movie, Thursday doesn't seem problematic, and I can see your point regarding Friday, although when I looked up Kwanzaa the colors of red and green were prominent on all the websites I looked at. When I looked at Makara Sankranti (Hindu) it was predominately gold and yellow, so I am unsure about the ownership of color belonging solely to Christianity. However, I do agree with the misuse of the term "holiday" and will work to ensure that it is rectified.

Keeping the commercialized frenzy toned down and our visuals and activities broad based and focused on learning is important as we respect others in our public spaces. However, I do not think that we must completely disassociate in order to maintain an inclusive and welcoming environment.

I do believe that we can do better to lead our students to more inclusive activities, and I am sorry to hear that it has negatively impacted some.
I am glad that you wrote and raised some excellent points, and will work to rectify the holiday-ish ness, both this week, and in our debrief with ASB as the year goes on.

Again, thank you for sharing--

Gail Danner
Principal
Olympic High School
Wk: 360.662. 2705
Cell: 360.531.1699

From: Siegel Zachary - OHS <ZacharyS@ckschools.org>
Sent: Thursday, December 12, 2019 10:55 AM
To: Danner Gail - OHS <GailD@ckschools.org>
Subject: Concern Regarding the Overtly Christian Nature of the Announced Spirit Days

I am unsure to whom this should be addressed since I do not want Kelsey to feel personally attacked.

I very much respect the effort that goes into planning spirit weeks, but I feel this year's winter spirit days suffer from some serious majority-culture blinders.

When I read the list, I could only ask,

Why are the spirit days exclusionary of non-Christians?

Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, and others do not wear ugly sweaters or festive socks unless we are trying to assimilate into majority White Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture (knowing full well we will never be able to truly assimilate).

Tacking on the word "holiday" does not make the traditions reflected in the spirit days any less overtly Christian.

The so-called "holiday colors" are not holiday colors; those are Christmas colors, plain as day.

This sends a clear message that one faith is preferred over others, when we should be providing a welcoming environment for people of all faiths.

Even relatively homogeneous communities such as ours have people who aren't of the dominant denomination who are profoundly uncomfortable with even the secular aspects of an inherently sectarian holiday.

I was going to try and quash my own feelings, since frankly I don't know if I have the stomach to be a public-facing Jewish agnostic at this point in time, but a handful of non-religious students approached me *in distress* after learning of the plans.

So, to borrow a phrase, here I am.

I think this needs to be corrected--promptly. What are your thoughts?